

The University of Chicago

THE EFFECT OF THE COLLEGE
EXPERIENCE UPON STUDENTS'
CONCEPTS OF GOD

A PART OF A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE GRADUATE FACULTY IN CANDIDACY FOR
THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY AND ETHICS

By
ARTHUR CONSAUL WICKENDEN

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THE EFFECT OF THE COLLEGE EXPERIENCE UPON STUDENTS' CONCEPTS OF GOD

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THE religion of college students is a subject of perennial interest. Frequently the claim has been advanced that our colleges rob young people of their faith, and as frequently the college has been painted as a place of spiritual enlightenment and development, where significant consecrations occur, and where great spiritual movements are born. Many observations have been published as to the result of the college experience upon the religious life and belief of students, some of which have been keen, and quite true, no doubt, to situations portrayed. Few attempts have been made, however, to determine by methods of objective measurement the effect of the college experience on the religious belief of students. Until such methods are perfected we cannot be sure of the facts. The present study is an attempt to discover by objective method what happens to one important aspect of student religious thinking during college days.

As the idea of God is conceived generally to be the central and pivotal concept of religion, the study has been directed specifically to discovering in what terms students conceive of God, and what changes are produced in their concepts as a result of four years in college. Limiting the study to one fundamental concept was done for the sake both of greater thoroughness with respect to it and the possibility of securing a much larger number of responses to a simple than to a complex study.

Young people find it very difficult to articulate their beliefs in religion, so it was determined that the instrument of investigation must be so constructed that students would have only to identify their own opinions from a number of possible choices

rather than to formulate them. A simple questionnaire in the form of a check-list was selected as the best means of meeting this end. The questionnaire finally used in gathering data was the product of a considerable evolution, being based in the first instance on a study of student expression of religious ideas as found in various sources, followed by numerous revisions in the light of responses and criticisms secured from students to the experimental instruments. As finally adopted for use in the study the questionnaire included thirty-five statements setting forth ideas of God found to be current among students. An arrangement was made so that respondents could check either agreement or disagreement with each of these statements. If uncertain concerning their position on any statement it was to be left unchecked. This group of statements was followed by lists of concepts and attributes, usually consisting of a single noun or adjective respectively. The student was asked to underscore such of these as he found descriptive of his thought of God. Finally a question was asked concerning the degree of vitality of the concept for the student's total religious faith. The statements and terms included in the instrument of investigation follow herewith.

IDEAS OF GOD

1. I think of God as the supreme personal power of the universe.
2. I regard God as man's loving heavenly Father.
3. I believe God is impersonal creative force.
4. The hypothesis of God is not necessary to the adequate explanation of the phenomena of life and nature.
5. I am of the opinion that there may be a god, but man can know nothing of his character.
6. I conceive God as humanity personified.
7. I regard God as a symbol for the highest social values.
8. I think the term "God" is meaningless.
9. I think of God as the cosmic mechanism.
10. I am of the opinion that all of reality is God.
11. I believe God is the creator of the universe, the author of nature, and the source of life.

12. I am of the opinion that God created the world, but is not active in it, nor interferes in its operation.
13. I think of God as the support furnished by the universe in the quest of human ideals and aspirations.
14. I regard God as comprising three persons in one.
15. I believe God is the order of the universe.
16. I think the character of God is best revealed in Jesus Christ.
17. I regard God and Jesus Christ as identical.
18. I think of God as the creative intelligence and moral purpose inherent in the ordering of the universe.
19. I believe that God inspires, guides, comforts, and strengthens those who trust him.
20. I think God punishes men for their wickedness and rewards righteousness.
21. I am of the opinion that God is the source of the moral law.
22. I believe God is active in all the world from the smallest electron to the largest sun.
23. I conceive of God as sometimes setting aside the laws of the physical universe in order to work a miracle.
24. My conviction is that God is active in the natural order but never contravenes its laws.
25. I regard God as the integrating power of nature.
26. I think it is possible for man to commune with God.
27. I believe God hears prayers and responds with definite answers.
28. I am of the opinion that God glories in the worship of himself by human creatures.
29. I think of God as at work in the social order to perfect it.
30. My conviction is that man may become a co-worker with God.
31. I believe God sends earthquakes, disasters, and misfortunes upon wicked communities in punishment for their wickedness.
32. I am of the opinion that God condemns all who do not profess faith in Christ as savior.
33. I feel that the idea of God is not essential to the religious quest.
34. I think God is oblivious to the concerns of men.
35. For me God is a vague undefined reality.

CONCEPTS OF GOD

Creator	Sovereign	Father	Humanity
Brother	Mother	Judge	Friend
Spirit	Life force	Myth	Supreme power

CONCEPTS OF GOD—*Continued*

Jesus	Absolute	Trinity	First cause
Nature	Beauty	Truth	Principle
Ideals	Refuge	Love	Integrating power
Guide	Inner light	Energy	Universal mind
Companion	Great mystery	Universe	Natural law
Mechanism	Resource	Reality	Illusion
Comforter	Savior	Inspirer	Conscience

ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

Omnipotent	Omniscient	Omnipresent	Infinite
Limited	Developing	Struggling	Eternal
Just	Merciful	Faithful	Creative
Personal	Impersonal	Purposeful	Miraculous
Human	Active	Approachable	Vague
Loving	Generous	Righteous	Stern
Supernatural	Superhuman	Immanent	Transcendent
Concerned	Unchanging	Christlike	Mysterious
Conscious	Responsive	Free	Perfect
Intelligent	Incomprehensible		

A scale on which to indicate how vital the concept of God is to the student's faith was included as follows: very vital, moderately vital, vital, little significance, no significance.

The study has been limited to colleges and universities within the central states, including Ohio, Indiana, Michigan, Illinois, and Minnesota, the area in which the investigator could best secure data. A few excursions into colleges in the East brought results markedly different. Both church colleges and tax-supported institutions have been included in the investigation, but the data are more complete for colleges of the first type than of the second due to difficulty in securing large-scale co-operation in the latter. Fifteen church colleges participated, to a degree at least, in the study, and five non-church institutions.

The plan was to secure the responses of Freshmen as soon as possible after their entrance in college, and those of Seniors late in the Senior year. The assumption is made, of course, that Seniors of a particular year were as Freshmen practically at the

position in their thought of God where the contemporary group of Freshmen are. In a number of colleges it was possible to secure responses from an entire entering class of Freshmen, and in the same and other colleges a good cross-section of the Senior class was secured by gathering responses from advanced students in a variety of departments. Responses from two thousand Freshmen, and almost a thousand Seniors have been included in the study.

IDEAS OF FRESHMEN

If it be agreed that the ideas checked by at least 50 per cent of the group represent the position of a typical member of the group, then we may compare the ideas of a typical Freshman entering a church college with a typical Freshman entering a non-church institution. The percentage of a group checking a particular item would represent the degree of likelihood that the typical Freshman would agree to that item. Listed in Table I are the statements to which typical Freshmen of these two types of institution would give their assent, the degree of likelihood of agreement, and the differences between the two groups. The figures are based on returns from 1,396 Freshmen in church colleges, and 594 in non-church colleges.

We have here the ideas of God most popular among Freshmen and the extent of the difference of adherence to them between the Freshmen of church and non-church colleges. In the light of the total comparison, including concepts and attributes as well, it may be affirmed that a typical Freshman entering a church college thinks of God as a loving, merciful, and generous heavenly Father, whose character is best revealed in Jesus Christ. He is the creator of the universe and the source of all life, and as the supreme power in the universe he is active in all its parts. He inspires, guides, comforts, and strengthens those who trust him. He has ordained the moral law, punishes wickedness, and rewards righteousness. Man may become a co-worker with him in the achievement of his ends and purposes,

among them being a better social order. Communion with God is a privilege open to men, and when they pray God hears and responds with definite answers.

The typical Freshman entering a non-church college will assent to most of the above but with less assurance. In the matter of prayer, however, there is only a 38 per cent likelihood that

TABLE I
COMPARISON OF RETURNS FROM CHURCH COLLEGE AND
NON-CHURCH COLLEGE FRESHMEN

	Church	Non-Church	Difference
	Per Cent	Per Cent	Per Cent
<i>Affirmations:</i>			
1. God as the supreme personal power in universe. . .	67	60	7
2. God as a loving heavenly Father.	84	67	17
11. Creator of universe, author of nature, and source of life.	87	70	17
16. Character of God best revealed in Jesus.	83	67	16
19. God inspires, guides, comforts, and strengthens those who trust Him.	88	75	13
20. God punishes men for their wickedness and rewards righteousness.	68	51	17
21. God is the source of the moral law.	63	56	7
22. God is active in all the world from the smallest electron to the largest sun.	74	53	21
26. It is possible for man to commune with God. . . .	63	38	25
27. God hears prayers and responds with definite answers.	61	41	20
30. Man may become a co-worker with God.	69	51	18
			178
Mean difference.			16.18

he will assent to the possibility of communion, and only a 41 per cent likelihood that he thinks that God hears prayers and responds with definite answers.

It is enlightening to note to what extent other ideas are held among Freshmen even though checked affirmatively by less than 50 per cent. For instance, we find that 25 per cent of the Freshmen in church colleges, and 30 per cent of those in non-church colleges check the statement (3), "I believe God is impersonal creative force." Only about one-tenth of this group,

however, failed to check either of the first two statements setting forth the idea of a personal deity, making clear that even among Freshmen there is considerable disposition to combine personal and impersonal qualities in the concept of God.

The idea of God as a symbol for the highest social values (7) is affirmed by 39 per cent of the Freshmen in the first type and 31 per cent of those in the second. Forty-five per cent of the one group, and 33 per cent of the other indicate a pantheistic tendency by identifying all of reality with God (10). That God is the support furnished by the universe in the quest of human ideals and aspirations (13) is affirmed by 32 per cent and 36 per cent of these groups, respectively. The tendency to conceive of God as three persons in one (14) is found among 48 per cent and 27 per cent of the two groups. God as the order of the universe (15) is checked by 41 per cent, and 31 per cent, respectively. Thirty per cent of the Freshmen in church colleges make God and Jesus Christ identical (17), and 24 per cent in the non-church colleges. Forty and 39 per cent, respectively, conceive of God as creative intelligence and moral purpose inherent in the ordering of the universe (18). Thirty per cent and 20 per cent, respectively, affirm that God works miracles by setting aside laws of the physical universe (23), whereas only 17 per cent and 20 per cent, respectively, assert that God is active in the natural order but never contravenes its laws (24). Apparently there exists a good deal of haziness in the minds of Freshmen concerning the relation of God to miracles.

God is conceived as one who glories in the worship of himself by human creatures (28) by 23 per cent and 15 per cent of the respective groups. He punishes wicked communities by sending earthquakes and other disasters upon them (31) according to 18 per cent and 14 per cent, respectively, and condemns all who do not profess faith in Christ as savior (32) by 19 per cent and 9 per cent, respectively. God is a vague undefined reality (35) for 23 per cent and 29 per cent of the two groups.

DO COLLEGES EXERCISE A SELECTION ON THE BASIS
OF RELIGIOUS THOUGHT?

Facts gathered concerning the views of Freshmen reveal differences, not only between church and non-church college groups, but also between colleges within these divisions, giving

TABLE II
COMPARISON OF FRESHMAN RESPONSES FOUR SELECTED CHURCH
AND TWO NON-CHURCH COLLEGES

	United Brethren	Presby- terian	Baptist	Congre- gational	State	Techni- cal
Number of responses.....	81	247	228	190	358	192
<i>Affirmations:</i>	Per Cent	Per Cent	Per Cent	Per Cent	Per Cent	Per Cent
1. God as supreme personal power in the universe.....	84	85	71	63	65	49
2. God as a loving heavenly Father..	96	90	78	75	75	55
11. Creator of universe, author of nature, and source of life.....	98	93	80	79	77	57
16. Character of God best revealed in Jesus.....	93	88	82	78	76	52
19. God inspires, guides, comforts, and strengthens those who trust him..	100	92	88	79	80	68
20. God punishes men for their wickedness and rewards righteousness...	90	72	60	53	58	43
21. God is the source of the moral law.	88	63	60	44	59	51
22. God is active in all the world from the smallest electron to the largest sun.....	90	75	71	66	56	49
26. It is possible for man to commune with God.....	77	75	65	45	46	26
27. God hears prayers and responds with definite answers.....	79	69	60	41	47	30
30. Man may become a co-worker with God.....	88	70	68	57	58	42

a definite indication that colleges exercise a selection on the basis of religious thought. In Table II a comparison is given of the typical affirmations of the Freshmen of four denominational and two non-church colleges. The church colleges are affiliated with the United Brethren, Presbyterian, Baptist, and Congregational denominations, respectively; the fifth institution is supported by the state and has an enrolment of 2,300; and the sixth is a technical school in a large city. They are arranged in the

order of variance from traditional orthodoxy, with the possible exception that the state university is no more liberal than the Congregational college.

It will be observed in the case of the four church colleges that a one two three four order is maintained throughout except in the case of the first statement where the Presbyterian college outranks the United Brethren by 1 per cent, a negligible difference. The state university and Congregational college are very close together, but the technical school is almost invariably the sixth in order. It is evident that these colleges select students according to their respective types from the standpoint of religious thinking, and this conclusion would be only further confirmed if the comparison were carried on to include statements checked negatively, and the most frequently checked concepts and attributes.

A natural question to ask at this point is whether these differences are due to differences in denominational emphasis? Such is only partially the case. Differences exist between Freshmen of colleges of the same denomination. Moreover when the Freshmen responses are grouped according to denominations rather than colleges no such consistent differences are found to exist as is found in the comparison according to the colleges. Probably the best explanation that can be offered for the fact of selection on the basis of religious thinking is that specific colleges attract their students from particular types of homes in certain localities, and these homes are characterized by a considerable similarity in religious thought.

IDEAS OF SENIORS

To appreciate the ideas of God most largely current among Seniors, it will be well to view them in comparison with the views of Freshmen in the same groups of colleges, and to follow that with comparisons between Seniors of different colleges. It will then be possible to indicate the trends of thought as determined by the college experience. The statements checked af-

firmatively most frequently by Seniors are much the same as those checked most often by Freshmen. The exceptions are statements 20, to the effect that God punishes men for their wickedness and rewards righteousness, and 27, that God hears prayers and responds with definite answers, which are checked by considerably less than 50 per cent of the Seniors in both types of colleges. The degree of affirmation accorded by Seniors to the other statements in comparison decreases in practically every instance as compared with the responses of Freshmen. So great is the decrease in the case of the non-church colleges that only two of the statements receive affirmative checks of more than 50 per cent. Table III indicates the differences between the responses of Freshmen and those of Seniors with respect to the ideas most frequently checked.

Considering the Seniors in the church colleges as a group, it is evident that the way in which they think of God is not radically different from the way in which Freshmen think. For the most part the Senior is less positive in his affirmations, and somewhat more positive in his denials than the Freshman. A rather large majority of Seniors in this group continue to think of God in personal terms, but not as naïvely and familiarly personal as do the Freshmen. This is probably the most noteworthy change. It is made clear by the responses to the first two statements of the questionnaire. To the first, that God is the supreme personal power in the universe, the responses from church college Seniors show an increase of 2 per cent over the Freshmen, going from 67 per cent to 69 per cent, but in the case of the second statement, which presents God as man's loving heavenly Father, hence more naïvely anthropomorphic, the decrease is 21 per cent, showing a decided trend away from the acceptance of the latter idea. The same tendency is evident in the responses to the statement that God punishes men for their wickedness and rewards righteousness (20); the decrease in Senior affirmations, as compared with Freshman, amounts to 29 per cent, going from 68 per cent to 39 per cent. The case of state-

TABLE III
COMPARISON OF FRESHMAN AND SENIOR RESPONSES
CHURCH AND NON-CHURCH COLLEGES

	CHURCH			NON-CHURCH		
	Fresh- men	Seniors	Differ- ence	Fresh- men	Seniors	Differ- ence
Number of responses	1,396	676	.....	594	290	.....
	Per Cent	Per Cent	Per Cent	Per Cent	Per Cent	Per Cent
<i>Affirmations:</i>						
1. God as the supreme personal power in the universe	67	69	2	60	49	11
2. God as a loving heavenly Father . .	84	63	21	67	35	32
11. God as the creator of the universe, author of nature, and source of life . .	87	75	12	70	45	25
16. Character best revealed in Jesus Christ	83	78	5	67	51	16
19. God inspires, guides, comforts, and strengthens those who trust him . .	88	80	8	75	54	21
21. God is the source of the moral law . .	63	51	12	56	41	15
22. God is active in all the world from the smallest electron to the largest sun	74	62	12	53	41	12
26. It is possible for man to commune with God	63	57	6	39	30	9
30. Man may become a co-worker with God	69	64	5	51	37	14
	.....	.....	83	.....	.....	155
Mean difference . . . . .	.....	.....	9.22	.....	.....	17.22
<i>Negations:</i>						
4. The hypothesis of God is unnecessary	69	63	6	59	48	11
8. The term "God" is meaningless . . .	87	75	12	75	61	14
12. God created the world, but is not active in it, nor interferes in its operation	66	60	6	60	52	8
31. God sends disasters on wicked communities as punishment	55	74	19	61	76	15
32. God condemns all who do not profess faith in Christ as Savior	56	67	11	71	78	7
33. The idea of God is not essential to the religious quest	67	62	5	55	45	10
	.....	.....	58	.....	.....	65
Mean difference . . . . .	.....	.....	9.83	.....	.....	10.83
<i>Concepts and Attributes:</i>						
Creator	85	71	14	69	46	23
Father	73	57	16	56	27	29
Spirit	52	50	2	37	30	7
Supreme power	68	57	11	50	42	8
Truth	66	62	4	57	37	20
Love	81	74	7	65	43	22
Omnipotent	51	57	6	39	35	4
Just	69	61	8	53	34	19
Merciful	74	58	16	56	35	21
Creative	63	50	13	47	37	10
Loving	81	68	13	65	40	25
Perfect	62	51	11	41	25	16
	.....	.....	121	.....	.....	204
Mean difference . . . . .	.....	.....	10.08	.....	.....	17

ments 26 and 27 should be considered together, both having to do with God's relation to man's practice of prayer. In the case of prayer as simply communion of two spirits with each other (26) the decrease in Senior responses is only 6 per cent, whereas in the more naïve statement to the effect that God hears prayers and responds with definite answers, the decrease amounts to 16 per cent, or from 61 per cent to 45 per cent.

Seniors in these same colleges likewise conceive of God as less magical and capricious than the Freshmen, confining his activities within the limits of natural law, rather than setting aside laws for the sake of working miracles in that sense. The disagreements with statement 23, which declares this latter idea, increase 18 per cent, while the affirmative checks to statement 24, which asserts that God in his activity never contravenes the laws of the natural order, increase that same amount.

With respect to the concepts listed in the questionnaire the degree of acceptance decreases in most instances between the Freshman and Senior years. In the church colleges the principal decreases are as follows: father, 73 per cent to 57 per cent; friend, 63 per cent to 47 per cent; guide, 64 per cent to 48 per cent; creator, 85 per cent to 71 per cent; judge, 37 per cent to 22 per cent; and companion, 47 per cent to 34 per cent. Considering the case of the attributes, the principal decreases are: merciful, 74 per cent to 58 per cent; faithful, 57 per cent to 42 per cent; generous, 51 per cent to 37 per cent; loving, 81 per cent to 68 per cent; creative, 63 per cent to 50 per cent; and miraculous, 33 per cent to 20 per cent. With the exception of the last-named, such terms continue to be among those most frequently checked by Seniors, hence favorite for them as well as the Freshmen, but the decreases further reveal the trend away from familiarly personal concepts.

Turning to points where the Seniors of church colleges are more positive in their affirmations than Freshmen, we find that the number of such increases is less than the number of decreases, and the differences, or the extent of the changes, are

not as great. Such increases as there are tend to show a growing preference for more abstract concepts. The greatest point of increase has already been mentioned, namely, that of 18 per cent in the instance of the statement (24) to the effect that God does not contravene the laws of the natural order in his activities. Next in order of increase is 14 per cent with respect to the statement (18) which declares God to be the creative intelligence and moral purpose inherent in the ordering of the universe. Put this increase alongside of the decrease of 21 per cent to the statement (2) presenting God as a loving heavenly Father, and one receives a pretty clear indication of the tendency to change from the familiarly personal to the more abstractly personal type of concepts. Another notable increase in this group is in response to the statement (25) that God is the integrating power of nature—an increase from 37 per cent to 49 per cent.

Concepts and attributes which show an increase between the Freshman and Senior years in church colleges include the following: life force, 27 per cent to 34 per cent; absolute, 13 per cent to 19 per cent; first cause, 5 per cent to 18 per cent; ideals, 40 per cent to 53 per cent; integrating power, 8 per cent to 21 per cent; energy, 18 per cent to 28 per cent; universal mind, 20 per cent to 26 per cent; natural law, 15 per cent to 22 per cent; omnipotent, 51 per cent to 57 per cent; omniscient, 16 per cent to 29 per cent; omnipresent, 33 per cent to 44 per cent; infinite, 35 per cent to 48 per cent; personal, 28 per cent to 45 per cent; impersonal, 6 per cent to 13 per cent; purposeful, 27 per cent to 38 per cent; immanent, 2 per cent to 10 per cent; and transcendent, 5 per cent to 11 per cent. Such increases are but the counterparts of the decreases, revealing further the tendency to prefer more abstract concepts to the more concrete and familiar.

A consideration of the Seniors in the non-church colleges reveals similar tendencies at work, but also a more marked trend toward impersonal, mechanistic, agnostic, and atheistic ideas. Only two affirmations of the list of thirty-five are checked affirmatively by as many as 50 per cent of the Seniors in the non-

church colleges, these being, "God inspires, guides, comforts, and strengthens those who trust Him" (19), which is checked by 54 per cent, and "The character of God is best revealed in Jesus Christ" (16), which is checked by 51 per cent. This is notable in itself, and further indicates that these Seniors do not tend toward one particular pattern of thought but are much more heterogeneous in their ideas than are Freshmen. The aversion to naïvely anthropomorphic ideas is even more marked among the non-church college Seniors than among those of church colleges, but the tendency to replace these by more abstract concepts is less marked. Instead, as already indicated, the tendency is to prefer impersonal, mechanistic, agnostic, or atheistic ideas, as shown by points where Senior responses show an increase over the Freshman. For example, the statement that God is impersonal creative force (3) shows an increase from 30 per cent to 38 per cent. The statement that the hypothesis of God is not necessary to the adequate explanation of the phenomena of life and nature (4) records an increase from 19 per cent to 26 per cent. The agnostic statement (5) shows an increase from 30 per cent to 38 per cent. The atheistic statement (8) reveals an increase from 6 per cent to 12 per cent. The idea of God as the cosmic mechanism (9) increase from 5 per cent to 17 per cent. The idea of God as not essential to the religious quest (33) increases from 16 per cent to 25 per cent, that God is oblivious to the concerns of men (34) from 11 per cent to 18 per cent, and that God is a vague undefined reality (35) from 29 per cent to 36 per cent. The only other notable increase recorded in the list of affirmations is in connection with the statement (24) that God is active in the natural order but never contravenes its laws, from 20 per cent to 29 per cent. Apparently a majority of Seniors of the non-church colleges continue to think of God in personal terms, but the most marked tendency in such institutions is in the direction of mechanistic, agnostic, or atheistic ideas.

Throughout the discussion it has been apparent that there is

a difference between the effect of church colleges on their students and non-church colleges on theirs, considering these as groups. It is possible to indicate the differences in these effects in statistical terms, at least so far as revealed by the data of this investigation. If one will refer to Table III, he will find noted at each point of comparison the extent of the change between Freshmen and Seniors, as 2 per cent in the case of the first statement in the church colleges, and 21 per cent in the case of the second. Calculating the mean difference with respect to the affirmative statements, it is found to be 9.22 per cent in the church colleges, as compared with 17.22 per cent in the non-church colleges. The difference between these two means, or 8 per cent, indicates how much farther the Seniors of non-church colleges have moved in their thought than those of the church colleges. In both instances the direction of movement is away from traditional conservative orthodoxy. In the case of statements most frequently checked negatively the mean differences are 9.83 per cent and 10.83 per cent, respectively; for the most frequently checked concepts and attributes the mean differences are 10.08 per cent and 17 per cent, respectively. The differences between these comparative means indicate to how great an extent the gap that existed between the Freshmen of the two types of colleges widens during the course of the college experience.

DO COLLEGES SIMILAR IN TYPE AFFECT STUDENTS DIFFERENTLY?

Having observed the difference in the influence of church and non-church colleges on the thinking of their students, it may be profitable to make some comparisons between specific colleges within each of these two classifications in order to note differences affected by colleges supposedly similar in type and background.

In Table II a comparison was made of the responses of Freshmen from four selected church and two non-church colleges in order to demonstrate the fact that colleges exercise a selection

from the standpoint of religious ideas, and that it is possible to arrange them in definite order in the degree of their variance from traditional orthodoxy. If a similar comparison were made between the responses of the Seniors of the very same institutions, the consistent order that was evident as regards the Freshmen would not be found to exist. The United Brethren college would still be the most conservative at all points. The Presbyterian and Baptist colleges would be found so close together as to be almost indistinguishable and to occupy the middle ground. The Congregational, state, and technical colleges would form the most liberal group, but it would be almost impossible to distinguish these from one another as to the degree of liberalism manifest.

A comparison of two colleges with like denominational affiliations, situated in adjoining states, will make even more evident that colleges of the same general type affect the thinking of their students differently (Table IV). In this comparison very little difference will be observed between the Freshmen of the two institutions, those of B college being somewhat more liberal than those of A, but a very marked difference is found between the Seniors, the Seniors of B being much farther removed from traditional orthodoxy than those of A.

The rather small mean difference, only 6.08 per cent, between the Freshmen of the two colleges shows that they are quite similar in their manner of thinking about God. In fact in only two of the instances named above is the difference greater than 6 per cent. But in the case of the Seniors the mean difference of 31 per cent makes it clear that they think in quite different terms. The trend in both institutions is away from the positions of traditional orthodoxy, but it is much more decided in B than in A.

A similar comparison between two non-church institutions, a state-supported university of 2,300 students, and a technical school of 800 students, would yield somewhat different results. The difference between the Freshmen of these institutions would

be found to be considerable, the mean difference in the case of typical affirmations being 15.33 per cent. The technical school attracts a more radical group in religious thought than does the

TABLE IV
COMPARISON OF RESPONSES FROM TWO BAPTIST COLLEGES

	FRESHMEN			SENIORS		
	A	B	Difference	A	B	Difference
Number of responses.....	228	86	.....	96	93	.....
	Per Cent	Per Cent	Per Cent	Per Cent	Per Cent	Per Cent
<i>Affirmations:</i>						
1. God as the supreme personal power in universe.....	71	77	6	68	38	30
2. God as a loving heavenly Father..	78	75	3	66	38	28
11. Creator of universe, author of nature, and source of all life.....	80	79	1	79	47	32
16. Character best revealed in Jesus Christ.....	82	78	4	89	58	31
18. Creative intelligence and moral purpose inherent in the ordering of the universe.....	44	48	4	67	35	32
19. God inspires, guides, comforts, and strengthens those who trust Him..	88	82	6	81	53	28
20. God punishes men for their wickedness and rewards righteousness....	60	64	4	36	17	19
21. God as the source of the moral law	60	66	6	67	26	41
22. God as active in all the world from the smallest electron to the largest sun.....	71	71	.....	74	33	41
26. It is possible for man to commune with God.....	65	44	21	63	20	43
27. God hears prayers and responds with definite answers.....	60	44	16	41	20	21
30. Man may become a co-worker with God.....	68	70	2	67	41	26
	.....	.....	73	.....	.....	372
Mean difference.....	.....	.....	6.08	.....	.....	31

state university. The college experience instead of widening the breach between these two groups, as in the former comparison, tends to narrow it, bringing the two groups of Seniors quite close together, as shown by the small mean difference of 4.67 per cent with respect to typical affirmations. The students of the state university undergo a greater change in ideas than those of the

technical school. The technical training of the latter is rather far removed from religious considerations and does not affect their ideas in this realm very markedly. In the state university the students are subjected to a much wider variety of cultural influences, many of which are directly related to religious thought, hence have a much more marked effect on their religious opinions.

HOW VITAL IS THE CONCEPT OF GOD TO RELIGIOUS FAITH?

Further light is thrown on the effect of the college experience on the faith of students by a comparison of the answers given by Freshmen and Seniors to the question, "How vital is the concept of God to your total faith?" (Table V).

TABLE V
COMPARISON OF FRESHMAN AND SENIOR RESPONSES ON THE
VITALITY OF THE CONCEPT OF GOD TO FAITH

	CHURCH			NON-CHURCH		
	Freshmen	Seniors	Difference	Freshmen	Seniors	Difference
	Per Cent	Per Cent	Per Cent	Per Cent	Per Cent	Per Cent
Very vital.....	53	39	14	40	22	18
Moderately vital.....	20	19	1	21	14	7
Vital.....	17	20	3	19	24	5
Little significance.....	4	10	6	9	26	15
No significance.....	1	1	.....	4	8	4

In the case of Freshmen in church colleges for 90 per cent the concept is either very vital, moderately vital, or vital whereas this is true for only 78 per cent of the Seniors, making a decrease of 12 per cent during the four years. The same comparison in the non-church colleges shows the decrease between Freshmen and Seniors to be from 80 per cent to 60 per cent, or a decrease of 20 per cent.

That the general influence of the college experience at this point is negative is freely conceded, but the figures leave little ground for the charge that church colleges generally rob students of their faith, when for 78 per cent of the Seniors the con-

cept of God is at least vital. Likewise, as long as 60 per cent of the Seniors of non-church colleges find the concept at least vital to their total faith, these institutions can scarcely be characterized as "Godless."

CLASSIFICATION INTO TYPES

Another method used to determine the nature of the college influence on the ideas of God was that of classification of students into specific types and analysis to determine to what extent students move from one type to another in the course of the four years. For this purpose it was assumed that all students who checked affirmatively either of the first two statements in the check list should classify as theists. They may be conservative, or they may be liberal, but by affirming either one of the statements that lead the list they indicate that they conceive of God in personal terms. This simple method served to classify the great majority of the replies.

Study was then directed to all the responses in which the first two statements were not checked. Of 1,396 responses received from Freshmen in church colleges only 111 were found in which neither of the first two statements were checked. Upon examination it was found that 26 of these should unquestionably be classified as personal theists in the light of succeeding statements, concepts, and attributes which were checked. Numerous of them underscored the attribute "personal," for instance. This left a group of 85 only to be classified as other than personal theists. Thirty-three of this latter group checked statement 3 indicating belief in God as impersonal creative force. But it was found necessary to divide this group into two categories. Fourteen of the 33, although they asserted that they conceived of God as impersonal, did not hesitate to ascribe to God functions and attributes which are distinctly personal. For example, of this group of 14, 11 checked affirmatively the statement (16) that the character of God is best revealed in Jesus Christ; 10 checked the statement (19) that God inspires, guides,

strengthens, and comforts those who trust him; 6 underline friend, 7 spirit, 11 love, and 10 guide, as symbols descriptive of their thought of God; 9 assert that God is just, 6 merciful, 5 purposeful, and 5 responsive. For purposes of identification this group will be designated as impersonal theists.

Nineteen of those who checked statement 3 affirming belief in an impersonal deity appeared to be rather thoroughgoing in their impersonal conception. This group will be designated as impersonalists. Of the remaining responses not yet classified 12

TABLE VI
COMPARISON OF TYPES

	CHURCH COLLEGES		NON-CHURCH	
	Freshmen	Seniors	Freshmen	Seniors
	Per Cent	Per Cent	Per Cent	Per Cent
Personal theists	93.9	81.7	81.7	60.7
Impersonal theists	1.	5.2	3.	13.4
Impersonalists	1.4	4.6	4.6	11.4
Agnostics	.9	3.4	2.2	4.1
Atheists	.1	.3	1.5	3.8
Too vague or confused to classify	2.7	4.8	7.	6.6
	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

were found to be quite consistent agnostics by their checking of statement 5 and almost no others in the affirmative. Two responses signified consistent atheism. Thirty-eight were found to be either too vague or too confused to classify. Classifying all the responses received by this method, the results may be exhibited in a comparison table (Table VI).

Examination of this table confirms the conclusions arrived at previously by other means. There is a trend in the direction of conceiving God more impersonally, a trend more marked in non-church colleges than in those with church affiliations, but in neither case is it of the nature of a landslide. Combining the two classes of theists, the personal and impersonal, in the church colleges the decrease in numbers is only 8 per cent between Freshmen and Seniors, and in the non-church schools 10.6 per

cent. The impersonal, non-theistic groups combined show a corresponding increase from 2.4 per cent to 9.5 per cent in the case of church colleges, and from 8.3 per cent to 19.3 per cent in the case of non-church colleges.

A word should be said concerning the attitude of students toward the modern religious phenomenon called humanism. No such classification was included in the above list because humanism has no fixed body of affirmations generally agreed to by those who call themselves humanists which differentiates them from these other classifications. There are theistic humanists and non-theistic humanists, Christian humanists, and humanistic naturalists. The one common bond between them is the devotion to the good life for all humankind. In this broad sense there is without doubt a decided drift toward humanism. The idea of God becomes socialized, but there is no very pronounced movement to substitute naturalism for some form of theism, at least in the colleges included in this study.

SOME CONSIDERATIONS CONCERNING FACTORS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE CHANGES

In an investigation of this kind where significant changes are found to occur in the thinking of students, one naturally becomes curious to know the reasons and forces which lie back of the changes and are chiefly responsible for them. To discover these in any specific situation would require direct first-hand study of that situation. One would have to determine the influence of specific members of the faculty, the contributions of the social and religious organizations that are integral to the life of the institution, the extent and nature of the influence exerted by the local churches, as well as the religious provisions made by the college itself. Such investigations are beyond the scope of the present study.

The data gathered, however, make possible the answering of one important question, namely, Does the field of a student's major study make a specific contribution to his manner of

thought about God? Otherwise stated, will it make any particular difference in the outcome in a student's thought about God whether he specializes in languages and literatures, science, history, or business administration? The assertion is frequently made that the student cannot study modern science and hold to his traditional idea of God. Can he then specialize in language, or business, or history, and be less affected? When the responses were classified according to the major subjects of the respondents, it was found that of seven groups—biological science, language, sociology, fine arts, history, physical science, and business—the most conservative group in church colleges was the group majoring in biological science, and the most liberal, that in business administration. No surprise would have been occasioned if the reverse had been the result, for one would expect perhaps that the study of biological science would affect concepts of God considerably, and business administration very little. Surely it is not the study of economics, business practice, and accounting that causes the business group to be the most liberal in the comparison. Rather we must conclude that the most radically minded religiously in the church colleges tend to train for business careers, whereas some of the most conservatively minded take pre-medic studies and specialize in biological science. In other words, so far as church colleges are concerned, apparently the matter of major subjects has little to do with the changes that are wrought in ideas of God, for scientific students may remain conservative, and language students may become liberal.

In a comparison of responses from non-church colleges on a similar basis the most conservative group was found to be the business students, with the engineering group a close second. Only four groups yielded a sufficient number of responses to serve for purposes of comparison: business, engineering, science (both biological and physical, but excluding engineering), and language. The general science group was found to be the most liberal with the language group a close second. The business

and engineering students were considerably more conservative than the language and general science groups. This makes it apparent that students in technical courses in the non-church schools which include only a minimum of so-called cultural electives are affected less in their religious thinking than others who are exposed to more currents of thought. But the fact that the difference between the language students and the science students is not especially great would indicate that the major subject here is not the all important factor. The general nature of the course seems more important than the particular field of specialization.

In the smaller colleges there exists much greater homogeneity in religious thought than in the larger universities. Of most church colleges it can be truthfully affirmed that there is a prevailing college mind with respect to religious views. The individual student tends to acquire this mind of the college as his own. If the college mind be conservative, the student tends to be strengthened in his conservatism, whether he study science, sociology, history, or fine arts. If the college mind be liberal the student tends to become liberal irrespective of the field of his major. To be sure, a conservative college may include on its staff a liberal professor who gathers to himself the liberals of the college and through them tinges the whole with a strain of liberalism, or the contrary case may be true. In general, however, the mind of the college in matters of religion tends to impress itself on the student without much regard to his field of major study.

REFLECTIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

A consideration of the study as a whole leads to certain conclusions, which, while not startling in nature, are of value nevertheless to those working in the field of religion in the colleges in affording a better insight into the actual situation. Freshmen bring with them to college the concrete symbols of traditional faith, which have been accepted uncritically as a rule, and since their ideas have not been subjected to vigorous criticism, they

are quite definite and certain with respect to their religious positions. This does not mean, however, that these positions are inherently consistent. In fact, there is much confusion, but the Freshman is not particularly aware of the inconsistencies of his position. In this respect he probably reflects the nature of popular religious thinking generally. Many religious ideas pass current among the people which it would be impossible to bring together into a consistent pattern of organization.

During the college experience these inherited ideas are challenged by other ideas received from studies and social contacts, and the student is led to question his body of accepted ideas and becomes unsettled in his religious thought. Although, in the large, the actual change in ideas that transpires is not greatly marked, certainly not revolutionary, yet one apparent result is the decline in dogmatic certainty. The Senior is not so sure of the validity of his ideas as he was as an entering Freshman, and there follows a correlative decline in the degree of vitality that the concept holds for his total faith. The great majority of Seniors, however, continue to regard the god concept as vital to their faith, even though they are less certain as to just what content should be poured into it, or less certain as to what symbols best indicate the nature of the reality meant. There is a growing recognition, as a result of the broadening intellectual experience of the college, of the inadequacy of any of our symbols to comprehend the reality which they would designate by the term God. Students do not discover better symbols than those already in common use with which to indicate their faith in the nature of the fundamental reality, but they do come to appreciate the limitations of those familiar symbols.

It is hardly surprising that undergraduates do not provide us with a new group of symbols, when religious leaders and recognized theologians are themselves perplexed with respect to what analogies from human experience can best be applied to give significant meaning to the concept of God for our modern scientific, politically democratic, and industrialized world. That

religious concepts undergo changes of meaning and development with broadening social experience, no one with a developmental view of life will deny. Certainly the present age is one of those transition periods in which the inherited concept is being newly interpreted in order to be better adapted to the requirements of a new culture. Students trained largely in the views of the old order in pre-college days are made to realize during the course of the college experience the inadequacy of the old symbols and use them with less certainty and great caution. For this reason the effect of the college experience appears to be negative, as the tendency to undermine traditional symbols is more evident than the reception and development of new ones. This is only what should be expected in an age when there is widespread disagreement among leaders in religious thought as to what symbols best describe the meaning of God in present experience. The colleges reflect the general uncertainty prevailing in the religious world.

As things stand in the colleges at present, however, there is evident a distinct preference for personal symbols rather than mechanistic, but personal symbols refined of naïve anthropomorphisms. There is something of a tendency at work to combine both personal and impersonal qualities in the concept, but with the personal predominating. There is also evident a growing disposition to conceive of God as manifesting himself through the medium of the natural order and not in contra-vention of its laws. The concept also becomes more socialized, the end of God's working in our world being the perfecting of the social order. Withal there is the tendency for the more abstract and philosophic symbols to increase in favor at the expense of the more concrete and familiar. Among other tendencies there is likewise one in the direction of agnostic and atheistic positions, especially in the non-church colleges.

Changes in thought are more marked, as a rule, in the institutions without church affiliations, where fewer safeguards are thrown around inherited religious beliefs. It is noteworthy, however, that in some church colleges the liberal tendencies are

every bit as marked as in the non-church institutions, and the changes affected in the thinking of the students are fully as great. In general, the mind of the college with respect to the conception of God tends to impress itself on the mind of the individual student. This is especially true in the smaller and more closely integrated institutions, and somewhat less so in the larger more heterogeneous institutions. Conservatively minded institutions may refine the thinking of their students, freeing it from certain crudities, but they send them forth conservatives of their own pattern, while liberal colleges produce liberals according to the nature and degree of their liberality.

